

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE--PNO-I-89-03

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by the Region I staff on this date.

Facility:
General Food Corporation
Maxwell House Division
Hoboken, New Jersey
Docket No: Non Licensee

Licensee Emergency Classification:
 Notification of Unusual Event
 Alert
 Site Area Emergency
 General Emergency
 Not Applicable

Subject: LOST DENSITY LEVEL GAUGE

On October 4, 1989, the licensee informed Region I that they were not able to locate a generally licensed Ohmart Corporation density gauge, that was previously in their possession. Region I was informed that an intensive search for the gauge was being conducted, and that it would be declared lost if not found by October 13. The gauge was not found and has been declared lost. The missing gauge is an Ohmart Model SR-1A, and contains 50 millicuries of cesium-137. The source holder is about the size and range of a tall coffee can (12¼ inches long, 7½ inches in diameter) and weighs approximately 140 pounds. External radiation levels were less than 5 millirem per hour at 30 centimeters from the surface of the gauge. The gauge had not been used in years and the shutter on the gauge is padlocked closed. The source holder has a "Caution Radioactive Material" sign, a statement that the use of this gauge is subject to the requirements of a general license, and the manufacturer's name, Ohmart Corporation. If the source was unshielded, dose rates may range as high as 175 millirem/hour at 30 centimeters, 157 rem/hour at 1 centimeter.

The last time that the gauge was known to be in the licensee's physical possession was August 2, 1989. Since then, the plant was shut down for maintenance activities, and a contractor removed duct work in the area the gauge was located. The licensee determined that the gauge was missing when it came due for leak test on October 4, 1989.

The licensee surmises that the gauge was removed from its facility by contractor personnel between August 2 and August 7, 1989. The licensee has searched the plant, interviewed its employees, the contractor's employees who were working at the plant, and has inspected three of the largest scrap metal yards in the area where the gauge may have been transferred. The licensee could not locate the gauge.

Region I performed an inspection on October 12, 1989, to review the circumstances, and to determine the most probable disposition of the device. The inspector also met with the managers of the three scrap yards, informed them of the lost gauge, and solicited their cooperation in trying to locate the device.

The State of New Jersey has been informed. This information is current as of 3:00 p.m. on October 13, 1989. NRC Region I will continue to follow-up on this event, and is preparing a Confirmatory Action Letter detailing the licensee's commitments to continue efforts to locate and recover the device. The Region I PAO is prepared to respond to media inquiries.

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